Ethnolinguistics 30 Lublin 2019

I. Articles

DOI: 10.17951/et.2018.30.113

Eliza Pieciul-Karmińska
ORCID: 0000-0002-6268-9873
(Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland)

The neuter in language and neutrality in literature as signals of cultural otherness?*

Abstract. It is assumed in the linguistic worldview conception that a language's grammatical structure can accentuate certain aspects of semantic content and thus contribute to the emergence of a specific, often unique and untranslatable worldview. A grammatical category of this kind is the neuter gender in German: its frequent use stems from the lack of gender endings on verbs, as well as from the fact that diminutives (ending in *-chen* or *-lein*) are neuter (hence the surprising neuter gender of *das Mädchen*). Especially important in this respect is the pronoun *es*, which not only replaces nouns in neuter but also performs many other crucial grammatical functions. It is therefore not accidental that Sigmund Freud chose *das Es* for his category of "childness" (translated erroneously as *id* into English and from there into Polish).

The productivity and frequency of the use of the neuter gender obviously leaves its trace. In literature, the category serves not only to express "childness" but also neutrality/universality, which is illustrated here with examples from the brothers Grimm's tales, Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman's, and contemporary children's literature (Paul Maar). It is then considered what happens to the neuter in Polish translation, whether the necessary reductions are only due to linguistic untranslatability and the "terror of Polish", or whether they may point to a subconscious (perhaps even a conscious) rejection of that category and a projection of a dichotomous male/female world.

Based on this grammatical phenomenon, this article shows how elements of language are manifested in literature and whether they can act as a cultural barrier in the translation process.

Key words: linguistic worldview; neuter gender; literary translation

* The article appeared in Polish as "Nijakość w języku i neutralność w literaturze jako sygnał odmienności kulturowej?" in *Etnolingwistyka* 30. The present English translation has been financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, project titled "English edition of the journal *Etnolingwistyka. Problemy języka i kultury* in electronic form" (no. 3bH 15 0204 83).

I look at the neuter gender not as a linguist but as a translator. While translating all two hundred tales by the Brothers Grimm, I noticed a peculiar over-representation of tale characters in neuter in the original and their conversion in the Polish translation into either feminine or masculine gender, as required by the norms of the Polish languge. A good commentary on this kind of situation comes from Jolanta Maćkiewicz: "The incompatiblity of the way in which various lanaguages segment the world is a phenomenon that is most striking in the context of constrastive analysis" (Maćkiewicz 1999: 52). That incompatibility is even more acute where a translation is necessary (cf. Gadamer 1989 [1960]). Hence, a translation analysis can reveal specific features of the source language that are invisible in a monolingual analysis.

1. Grammatical gender as a means of conveying linguistic worldview

In approaching the grammatical category of gender in the German-Polish pair, I had to ask myself if it is merely a structural category that does not affect meaning, and as such should simply be "exchanged" for a corresponding category in the target language. Or does it also convey a meaning that – along with the loss involved in translation (replacing the neuter with the masculine or feminine gender) – will also be reduced.

As regards the translation of grammatical gender, Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (1996 [1957]) notes that the translator must overcome the objective difficulty of the structural difference between the two languages. Using the example of the English sentence *Astrid spoke first* and its Polish translation *Astrid odezwał(a) się pierwszy/-a* [Astrid speak-PAST-MASC/FEM first-MASC/FEM], he emphasises that:

> an apparently purely formal operation, consisting in the selection of a grammatical form in the translation which is the equivalent of the form used in the original [...], has led to enrichment or reduction of the amount of information contained in the text. (Wojtasiewicz 1996: 26)

Thus, it is not a simple replacement of grammatical information, since the translator has to interpret the meaning of the grammatical form, while bearing the risk of distorting this meaning (Wojtasiewicz 1996: 32).

1.1. Linguistic worldview encoded in grammatical categories

Undoubtedly, the idea that a certain worldview is encoded in grammatical categories is hardly new: it has lain at the heart of the linguistic worldview conception. Linguistic worldview has been defined by Ryszard Tokarski as

> a set of regularities contained in categorical grammatical relations (inflectional, word-formational, syntactic) and semantic structures of lexis. Those regularities display specific ways of seeing various components of the world and a more general understanding of the world's organization, hierarchies prevailing in it and values accepted by the speech community. (Tokarski 2001: 366)

Linguistic worldview can be reconstructed by analysing verbal utterances, in particular by asking what elements of the language system convey that worldview. The role of grammatical categories is stressed by Grzegorczykowa, who suggests that "one should distinguish those elements of linguistic worldview that are manifested in grammatical properties of the language from those reflected in lexis, i.e. in the meanings and connectivity of the lexemes" (1999: 43).

Interestingly, an intuitive recognition of the link between linguistic worldview and grammatical gender can already be found in Stanisław Szober's *Gramatyka języka polskiego,* a Polish grammar of 1923 (here in its 12th edition, Szober 1962),[1] in which the author writes this about the Polish gender in the plural:

> [I]n the masculine personal and non-masculine personal genders in plural, there is indirect valuation. [...] These categories impose an axiological division upon objects: masculine persons form as if a class of higher beings, all other objects and women belong to the category of things with a lower status. (Szober 1962: 120)

Szober, thus, drew attention to the phenomena that were to become a focus of contemporary research on linguistic worldview.

The author who first wrote on the Polish category of masculine personal gender in the context of linguistic worldview reconstruction was Renata Grzegorczykowa, in whose opinion that category "can be treated as a testimony to the privileged position of men in former Poland" (2002: 163).

In this study I would like to focus on a different segmentation of the world[2] in the German-Polish language pair in relation to the category of neuter gender: its frequency and areas of use, as well as its markedness. As already mentioned, I became inspired by translation difficulties I had to struggle

[1] Here, I refer to the post-war edition of Stanisław Szober's *Gramatyka języka polskiego* [Grammar of the Polish Language] edited by Witold Doroszewski (1962), which is based on the 1923 edition.

[2] The notion of a different segmentation of the world in different languages is closely related to the idea of linguistic worldview, which Grzegorczykowa defines as "a way of understanding the world (its perception and conceptualisation), retrievable from linguistic facts, such as inflectional and derivational features, phrases and idioms, groups of synonyms that reveal a specific categorisation of the world, and finally from the connotations and stereotypes associated with referents" (Grzegorczykowa 2002: 163).

with myself, hence in further considerations I will use my own translations as a source of study material, including classic children's literature.

1.2. Grammatical gender in translation

Are grammatical categories "transparent" or do they carry meaning, as claimed in the linguistic worldview conception? In other words, can grammatical gender be meaningful or even ideologically significant?

Many linguists, including Roman Jakobson, agree that grammatical gender is not semantically "transparent":

> But in jest, in dreams, in magic, briefly, in what one would call everyday verbal mythology and in poetry above all, the grammatical categories carry a high semantic import. In these conditions, the question of translation becomes much more entangled and controversial. Even such category as grammatical gender, often cited as merely formal, plays a great role in the mythological attitudes of a speech community. (Jakobson 2000 [1959]: 117)

Surely, it takes a practitioner to say more about their daily struggle with e.g. personifications and metaphors of the days of the week (as the Polish masculine *poniedziałek* 'Monday' vs. the feminine *środa* 'Wednesday'), of everyday objects (a dropping of a fork, Pol. *widelec*-MASC, heralds the arrival of a male guest), or of natural phenomena (the day [*dzień*-MASC] as a man and the night [*noc*-FEM] as a woman). In this context, it should be remembered that the most famous cultural personifications, namely that of death, which, depending on the language, can be either female (*kostucha* in Polish) or male (*der Gevatter Tod* in German).

And so, the translator of German literature into English, Anthea Bell, questions the common opinion that grammatical gender does not affect the way people think. As a translator between languages where the target language is "genderless", Bell indicates that she repeatedly had to make an interpretation that went beyond a purely technical transfer when she was forced to choose a pronoun for an animal character in a tale:

> [. . .] and just because we must choose a pronoun, where choice is automatic in the source language, the matter becomes peculiarly delicate, since the chosen pronoun may make a much more definite statement in the genderless target language. (Bell 2006: 235)

The translator arbitrarily had to determine the sex of fairy-tale animals, such as a mouse, dog, cat or toad, and she attributed the female sex to animals that were subordinate, and the male sex to the dominant ones, which followed from her assumptions as to cultural roles (cf. Bell 2006: 238).

My observations are based on the German-Polish language pair. While both languages distinguish grammatical gender, the segmentation of the

world made with this category is not symmetrical, which I intend to illustrate with German neuter gender and its unique semantics both in grammar and in literary texts. Then I will try to analyze its existing (and potential) translations into Polish.

I will follow Elżbieta Tabakowska (2002), when, analysing the category of voice in Polish, the author says:

> culture is embedded in grammar and therefore translating grammar from one language into another must entail "translating" the culture of the community where that language evolved. (Tabakowska 2002: 73)

2. The neutral gender in German vs. the neuter gender in Polish

My intuitive impression that the neuter gender is overrepresented in the source text finds its confirmation in the German grammar: the neuter gender there manifests itself on many levels, including those that are absent from the Polish grammar. In German terminology, the category is labelled *das Neutrum*, i.e. the neutral gender. This term – especially when confronted with the Polish *rodzaj nijaki*, which also has a deprecating meaning, makes a "neutral" impression, and is more closely associated with universal and genderless contexts. Hence, it does not primarily connote – unlike in Polish – the quality of immaturity ("childness"). Similarly, unlike in Polish, the neuter gender in German is not associated with negatively valued asexuality, which is the case with the Polish expressive nouns ending in neuter *-isko/-ysko*, or *-ajło*, *-dło*, such as *kobiecisko* 'woman-AUGM NEUT', *chłopisko* 'bloke-AUGM NEUT', *strachajło* 'scaredy-cat-NEUT', *chamidło* 'lout-NEUT' (cf. Dzięgiel 2015: 18).[3] Therefore, when referring to the German neuter gender, I will use the term "neutral gender".

2.1. The neutral gender in German

From the standpoint of a linguist and grammarian, the contexts in which the neutral gender is used in German form a rather eclectic category: I look at it from the point of view of its effects, rather than the motivations for

[3] In this context, Dzięgiel recalls the hypothesis of Anna Wierzbicka, who recognises that such words form a separate category: "Most words of this kind are derived from basic words which are either feminine or masculine, and the replacement of this basic 'natural' gender by neuter gender signals the speaker's emotional attitude, an attitude corresponding to the component 'I don't want to think of this person, etc. as a woman/girl/man/boy, etc.'." (Wierzbicka 1996: 398).

use. As a translator, I deal with linguistic data, not grammatical rules. From this perspective, the neutral gender in German appears as not only more exposed in comparison to the neuter gender in Polish, which is dominated by the biological, animistic division into the male and female domains (cf. Duda 2016: 186ff.), but also has a number of special functions.[4]

The neutral gender in German is present in the following areas:

1. Many neutral gender nouns (especially in children's literature) arise thanks to the dimunitive endings *-chen* and *-lein* that impose the neutral gender on nouns (cf. Helbig and Buscha 1991: 274). As a result, certain nouns that denote females are neutral in gender: *das Mädchen* [the-NEUT girl-NEUT] and *das Fräulein* [the-NEUT miss-NEUT].

2. Nominalised infinitves (*das Sprechen* [the-NEUT speaking], *das Fragen* [the-NEUT asking]), adjectives (*das Schöne* [the-NEUT beautiful], *das Wesentliche* [the-NEUT essential]) and other parts of speech, such as pronouns (*das Ich* [the-NEUT self]) or conjunctions (*das Aber* [the-NEUT but]) are always of neuter gender.

3. The personal pronoun *es* (neuter, 3rd person, sing.) not only fulfills its basic function (of replacing a noun), but also has important syntactic functions, unique to German and absent from Polish. The most important of those is the function of the grammatical subject in impersonal constructions of the type *es regnet* 'it rains', *es klingelt* 'it rings' and in passive constructions, such as *es wurde getanzt* 'it was danced' (i.e., people danced) (cf. Poźlewicz et al. 2013: 50ff.).

4. The special importance of the pronoun *es* was recognised by Sigmund Freud, who chose it (in a "doubly neutral" form, i.e. the nominalized form *das Es*) as the name for one of the three basic concepts in his psychoanalysis (*das Es* [the-NEUT it], *das Ich* [the-NEUT self] and *das Über-Ich* [the-NEUT over-self]). He did so not only because *es* connotes a child (just like *er* connotes a man and *sie* – a woman), but precisely on the basis of its syntactic function, thanks to which impersonal sentences with *es* are associated with that which lies beyond awareness. Freud himself, *expressis verbis*, indicates that such understanding of *das Es* has a rich tradition in German literature, for example in the writings of Nietzsche, "who habitually used this grammatical term for whatever in our nature is impersonal and, so to speak, subject to natural law" (Freud 1960: 17).

[4] In German, the biological (natural) gender plays a rather marginal role compared to the grammatical gender (cf. Helbig and Buscha 1991: 269) and is limited to two groups of nouns: names of people and names of animals. It is the grammatical gender that plays the decisive role (p. 270).

5. Such broad application of the neutral gender in German also results from the absence of gender endings in the conjugation paradigm, so that German verbs, in all genders, have the same, equally valid conjugation (cf. Helbig and Buscha 1991: 23ff.).

2.2. The neuter gender in Polish: the peculiarities of conjugation

The "equal validity" of the neutral conjugation in German becomes especially evident when compared to the conjugation patterns in Polish, where the neuter gender appears to be "defective" and sub-standard. In Polish grammar books, neuter forms for the 1st and 2nd person singular of the past and future tense are often omitted, even though from the point of view of the language system they are possible and regular formations.

Hence, in presenting the list of conjugation endings for the 1st and 2nd person singular, Szober (1962: 269) only includes the forms for masculine and feminine gender. Piotr Bąk, in his grammar, says that "the neuter forms of the 1st and 2nd person are rarely used" (Bąk 1979: 300) and indeed, they are not provided in a table that illustrates the conjugation pattern. The author justifies his decision on pragmatic grounds:

> The [neuter] form for the first person is practically non-existent, because objects designated as neuter in gender do not speak, and babies, when they start talking, immediately use the forms of either masculine or feminine gender. (Bąk 1979: 300)

From the point of view of a linguist, this is rather surprising: reference is made here to the realm of biology (only people can talk, and people are either male or female).

In the nineties, in an article under the meaningful title "What exists and what does not exist in Polish inflection", Zygmunt Saloni (1992) argued for an inclusion of inflectional forms of the neuter gender.[5] In Alicja Nagórko's grammar (Nagórko 1997: 112), these forms are referred to as "potential" but they actually are included in the conjugation table.[6] However, the author points out that these forms are not to be found "in standard language use":

> The neuter forms of the 1st and 2nd person, such as *będę kupowało* [be-FUTURE-1ST-SING buy-PAST-3RD-NEUT], *kupowałom* [buy-PAST-1ST-NEUT], *będziesz kupowało* [be-FUTURE-2ND-SING buy-PAST-3RD-NEUT], *kupowałoś* [buy-PAST-2ND-NEUT] are potential but do not occur in standard language use. (Nagórko 1997: 114)

[5] Łaziński (2006: 190n.) mentions other authors who joined the discussion and became involved in a "search" for the uses of neuter forms.

[6] Saloni and Świdziński (1998: 181) also provide a complete conjugation of the verb *czytać* 'to read', including the neuter forms *czytałom* [read-PAST-1ST-NEUT] and *czytałoś* [read-PAST-2ND-NEUT].

But where do we find the "non-standard" areas of their use? Both Bąk (1979: 300) and Nagórko (2006: 114) admit that this is literature; cf. also Łaziński in the same spirit: "the neuter 1st person singular forms of verbs in Polish can be created, but only for the sake of poetic anthropomorphization" (2006: 191). Interesting insights come from Łukasz Szałkiewicz, the author of the online blog "Dobry słownik" [Good dictionary],[7] whose search for these forms in Polish shows that they do exist but are not numerous (Szałkiewicz mentions about ten) and exceptional.

2.3. Conclusions: the range and frequency of the neutral gender

In conclusion, the neutral gender in German has many more exponents than the neuter gender in Polish thanks to the syntactic functions of the pronoun *es*, the diminutive endings, and lack of gender marking on conjugation endings of German verbs. Clearly, the use of the neutral gender in both colloquial and literary German is not correlated with any objective difficulty, as is the case in Polish, where the lack of neuter endings is a factual hindrance. Thus, the grammatical system of German enables equal use of the three gender forms, in contrast to Polish, where verbs in the 1st and 2nd persons can only be used in the masculine or feminine gender.

Does this trouble-free use of *das Neutrum* indeed manifest itself in its greater frequency? Does neutrality in the language system gain adequate representation in literary texts?[8] And how is it translated into a language that segments the world differently due to the different construction of the category of gender?

3. Gender neutrality in literature: the case of translation

As I have already mentioned, I will be referring in my analysis to selected translations of literary texts. I will analyse the tales of the brothers Grimm, E.T.A. Hoffmann's "artistic" stories, and its contemporary continuation in Paul Maar's prose – the neutral gender has a specific function in them all.

[7] http://blog.dobryslownik.pl/sloneczko-wstalos-nie-zaspalom-o-tajemniczymrodzajunijakim-czasownikow/ (accessed 15 May, 2017).

[8] Literary texts will be analysed in accordance with Jakobson's assumption that there are no qualitative differences between literary language and colloquial language (cf. Tabakowska 2002: 74).

3.1. Brothers Grimm's tales: universal characters with neutral names

In the brothers Grimm's tales, there are numerous human characters in the neuter gender, including the use of diminutive suffixes and the unproblematic conjugation of verbs in all three genders.

Hence, due to the diminutive endings,[9] many Grimm characters have names or nicknames in the neutral gender, such as *Rotkäppchen* 'Little Red Riding Hood', *Schneiderlein* 'Little Tailor', *Rumpelstilzchen* 'Rumpelstiltskin', *Dornröschen* 'Sleeping Beauty', regardless of their biological sex. As is well-known, for instance, *das Rotkäppchen* was a girl, and *das Schneiderlein* was a young man. Other names can be added here that are of neutral gender in German: *das Aschenputtel* 'Cinderella', *das Allerleirauh* 'All-Kinds-of-Fur', *das Rosenrot* 'Rose-Red', *das Rapunzel* 'Rapunzel'. One can get the impression that the majority of female characters, the "prominent" protagonists, whose names also appear in the titles, are of the neutral gender, further reinforced by the frequent use of the noun *das Mädchen* [the-NEUT girl-NEUT].

The neutral gender in fairy tales, originally a matter of grammar, has gradually led to the emergence of an idiosyncratic fairy-tale worldview. Bruno Bettelheim (1976) points out that it is not so much about the childness of the characters[10] as about their universality – the fact that fairy tales create a universal character with whom the reader can identify regardless of their sex. According to Bettelheim, what seems to be a purely grammatical procedure proves significant to the meaning. In the introduction to his *Kinder brauchen Märchen*, Bettelheim talks about a boy who, while reading the tale of Rapunzel, could easily identify with the protagonist and find the strength in her story that helped him overcome his own problems (e.g. loneliness), since children of both sexes can identify with the "neutral" Rapunzel in the original tale.

In this sense, most of the Grimms' fairy tales talk about people. When we read about a character in the neutral gender, we perceive them as a more universal figure. In addition, as it is obligatory in German to use a pronoun in the absence of the noun (in Polish, personal pronouns appear only for emphasis[11]), the pronoun *es* is used in virtually every sentence, signaling the

[9] Apart from the standard endings *-chen* and *-lein*, there are also dialectal endings *-li* (e.g. *das Birnli*), *-le* (as in the title of tale no. 167: *Das Bürle im Himmel*), or *-el* (as in *Hänsel und Gretel*).

[10] Note for example that neither Cinderella nor Little Red Riding Hood are child characters!

[11] In Polish, the personal pronoun can be omitted (*Idę do szkoły* [GO-PRESENT-1ST to

neuter gender. This is additionally strengthened by the noun *das Mädchen*, which is replaced with the pronoun *es*. In *Cinderella*, before her nickname *Aschenputtel* is used, the protagonist is consistently referred to by means of the pronoun *es*:

Da mußte **es** von Morgen bis Abend schwere Arbeit thun, früh vor Tag aufstehn, Wasser tragen, Feuer anmachen, kochen und waschen. Obendrein thaten **ihm** die Schwestern alles ersinnliche Herzeleid an, verspotteten **es** und schütteten **ihm** die Erbsen und Linsen in die Asche, so daß **es** sitzen und sie wieder auslesen mußte. Abends, wenn **es** sich müde gearbeitet hatte, kam **es** in kein Bett, sondern mußte sich neben den Herd in die Asche legen. Und weil **es** darum immer staubig und schmutzig aussah, nannten sie **es** Aschenputtel. (KHM, 119)[12]

In the Polish translation of this fragment, only feminine forms are used. Gender forms are more frequent in the Polish translation in comparison to the German original since in Polish gender endings are used when conjugating verbs and in predicative adjectives:

Tam od rana do nocy musiał**a** ciężko pracować: wstawać wcześnie rano, przynosić wodę, rozpalać w piecu, gotować i prać. Na dodatek siostry dokuczały **jej**, jak tylko mogły, drwiły z **niej** i wsypywały groch z soczewicą do popiołu, a **ona** musiał**a** potem ślęczeć, wybierając ziarenka. Wieczorami, gdy był**a** zmęczon**a** całodzienną pracą, nie mogł**a** pójść spać do łóżka, lecz musiał**a** kłaść się obok pieca w popiele. A że z tego powodu zawsze był**a** brudn**a** i usmolon**a**, nazwały **ją** Kopciuszkiem. (Grimm and Grimm 2010: 127)

There, from dawn till dusk, [she] had [have-PAST-3RD-FEM] to work hard: get up early in the morning, bring water, light the fire in the stove, cook and wash. In addition, the sisters teased [her] as much as they could, mocked [her] and poured peas with lentils into the ash, and she had [have-PAST-3RD-FEM] to slog away at picking up the seeds. In the evenings, when [she] was [be-PAST-3RD-FEM] tired [FEM] of all-day work, [she] could not [not can-PAST-3RD-FEM] sleep in bed, but [she] had [have-PAST-3RD-FEM] to lie next to the stove in the ashes. And because [she] was [be-PAST-3RD-FEM] always dirty [FEM] and blackened [FEM] with cinders, they called [her] Cinderella.

The Brothers Grimm's fairy tales in Polish translation

Table 1 contains the list of the best-known German neutral names[13] and nicknames and their Polish translations.

school], *Idziesz do szkoły* [Go-PRESENT-2ND to school]), while in German it is obligatory (*Ich gehe in die Schule*, *Du gehst in die Schule*). In Polish, it is overtly expressed for emphasis: ***Ja*** *tego nie zrobię* [I this not do-FUTURE-1ST], *Dlaczego* ***ty*** *tego nie powiesz?* [Why you this not say-FUTURE-2ND] (cf. Skibicki 2007: 172).

[12] This is the generally accepted notation: KHM refers to the 1857 edition of Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the number that follows is the number of the tale. [editor's comment]

[13] It is worth noting here that there are also less conspicuous characters that have the neuter gender, such as the title characters from the following tales: *Rumpelstilzchen*

Table 1. Selected German neutral names and nicknames in the Grimm's tales and their Polish translations

	German original	Polish translations	
	Neutral gender	Masculine gender	Feminine gender
1.	Rapunzel (KHM 12)		Roszpunka
2.	Aschenputtel (KHM 21)	Kopciuszek	
3.	Rotkäppchen (KHM 26)	Czerwony Kapturek	
4.	Dornröschen (KHM 50)		Śpiąca Królewna
5.	Schneewittchen (KHM 53)		Śnieżka
6.	Allerreirauh (KHM 65)		Wieloskórka
7.	Einäuglein (KHM 130)		Jednooczka
8.	Rosenrot (KHM 161)		Różyczka
9.	Schneeweißchen (KHM 161)		Śnieżynka

All the neutral names have been replaced with names in either feminine (in most cases) or masculine gender in accordance with the dichotomic Polish linguistic worldview. Interestingly, in two fairy tales in which female characters are referred to with masculine names, this gender is nevertheless corrected when the protagonist is referred to with a synonymous generic noun, such as *dziewczyn(k)a* 'girl/little girl' or *panna* 'young girl'. The translator (as if subconsciously) corrects the incongruity of the grammatical and biological gender, which can be seen in the following example:

Der Königssohn kam **ihm** entgegen, nahm **es** bei der Hand und tanzte mit **ihm**. (KHM, 122) [lit. 'The prince approached it, took it by its hand and danced with it.']

A tymczasem królewicz wyszedł naprzeciw **dziewczynie**, wziął **ją** za rękę i tańczył z **nią**. (Grimm and Grimm 2010: 130) [lit. 'Meanwhile, the prince came out to meet the girl, took her by the hand and danced with her.']

This is also due to the fact that Polish does not tolerate an excess of personal pronouns, which occur mainly for emphasis. Therefore, the translator, in order to maintain the neutrality of the text, is often forced to defy the source text and introduce nouns in the places where pronouns are used in the orignal, which even more precisely specifies the gender of the characters – especially in the case when *das Mädchen* is replaced with the Polish word *dziewczyna* 'girl'.

(KHM, 55) 'Rumpelstiltskin', *Hänsel und Gretel* (15) 'Hansel and Grethel', *Brüderchen und Schwesterchen* (11) 'Little Brother and Little Sister', *Das tapfere Schneiderlein* (20) 'The Valiant Little Tailor'. In addition, many other diminutive names appear in the Grimms' tales, and their importance is often manifested by the fact that they are present in the title of the tale, e.g.: *Läuschen* 'Little Louse', *Flöhchen* 'Little Flea', *Mäuschen* 'Little Mouse', *Vögelchen* 'Little Bird', *Hütlein* 'Little Hat', *Hörnlein* 'Little Horn', *Kätzchen* 'Little Cat', *Lämmchen* 'Lambkin', *Fischchen* 'Little Fish', *das Eselein* 'Little Donkey', *das Hirtenbüblein* 'Little Sheperd Boy'.

The neutrality of the protagonist in the source text is additionally manifested with the pronoun *es*, an immediately recognisable reference to the main character. This can be seen very clearly in the excerpts of the conversation between Cinderella and her stepmother, in which Cinderella is consistently referred to with the pronoun *es* 'it' and the stepmother with *sie* 'she':

Da brachte **das Mädchen** die Schüssel **der Stiefmutter**, freute sich und glaubte **es** dürfte nun mit auf die Hochzeit gehen. Aber **sie** sprach „nein, Aschenputtel, du hast keine Kleider, und kannst nicht tanzen: du wirst nur ausgelacht". Als **es** nun weinte, sprach **sie** „wenn du mir zwei Schüsseln voll Linsen in einer Stunde aus der Asche rein lesen kannst, so sollst du mitgehen". (KHM, 121)

In Polish, the above exchange of opinions between the stepmother (*sie*) and Cinderella (*es*) is turned into a conversation between two women, where both of them are referred to with the feminine pronoun *ona* 'she' and more frequently with the feminine nouns *macocha* 'stepmother' and *dziewczyna* 'girl', respectively. In this way, the juxtaposition of the universal protagonist (signalled by *es*) and the character that clearly belongs to the category of females (stepmother, adult woman, signalled by *sie*) disappears in the target text:

Dziewczyna zaniosła miskę **macosze**, ciesząc się i wierząc, że teraz będzie mogła iść na bal.

– Nie, Kopciuszku, nie masz ubrań i nie umiesz tańczyć. Byłabyś pośmiewiskiem – powiedziała **macocha**.

Gdy **dziewczyna** rozpłakała się, **macocha** rzekła:

– Jeśli wyzbierasz mi dwie pełne miski soczewicy z popiołu, pójdziesz z nami. (Grimm and Grimm 2010: 129)

[The girl carried the bowl to the stepmother, filled with joy and believing that now she could go to the ball.

"No, Cinderella, you do not have the clothes and you cannot dance. You would be a laughing stock", said her stepmother.

When the girl burst into tears, the stepmother said:

"If you pick up two full bowls of lentils from the ashes, you will go with us."]

Bruno Bettelheim's translator Danuta Danek suggests that the Polish name for Cinderella, the masculine *Kopciuszek*, should be replaced with the neuter-gender *Popielątko*, which would reflect the original neutrality of the name. However, the fairy tale as genre imposes certain limitations on translators: while translating such canonical texts as the Grimms' tales, one cannot disregard the role of tradition, which requires that the translator select the established and "sanctified" names, even if their form obliterates

the essential elements of the source text.[14] And so, in my Polish translation, I did not experiment with the name *Kopciuszek*, although I explained the additional aspects of the meaning of the original name in the footnote. However, I replaced the inadequate *Śpiąca Królewna* 'Sleeping Beauty' with the name *Cierniowa Różyczka* 'Thorny Little Rose'.

Nevertheless, because the brothers Grimm's tales are stylised as folk tales, there is little room for formal grammatical experiments. The universality of characters can (and should) be signalled only in the paratext, and not through a defiance of the naming convention, in the narration, or in dialogues.

3.2. The figure of a "strange child": the genderless genius

A text in which the neutral gender is not only grammatically present, but also has an overtly signalled significance for the content is E.T.A. Hoffmann's fairy tale *Das fremde Kind* [The Strange Child] from 1817.[15] It is valuable evidence for how neutrality in the language system is creatively used to signal universality in a literary text.

Das fremde Kind began a literary series in which the catalyst for each story is the "genius" – a magical being from another world that enters and completely changes the life of a child.[16] That being either has no sex, its sex is unrecognisable, or irrelevant – the character is therefore "universal" (cf. Kümmerling-Maibauer 1997). The sexual neutrality of the genius alludes to the idea of a universal human being, uninhibited by cultural roles assigned on the basis of the biological sex.

In Hoffmann's tale, the "strange child" is grammatically presented as a neutral character (*das Kind* and *es*) – such is also the case in the content of the tale itself, in which the author explicitly depicts its genderlessness. When it is met by two children (brother and sister), they describe it through the prism of their own sex:

[14] In this context, it is particularly illustrative to recall the controversy that arose in connection with the Polish translation of A. A. Milne's character Winnie-the-Pooh. The canonical *Kubuś Puchatek*, a masculine name, invented by Irena Tuwim (who translated *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* in the early 20th century), was replaced by *Fredzia Phi-Phi*, a feminine name, in Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska's translation from 1986. [However, the later translation was met with fierce resistence from most readers and many critics, editor's comment.]

[15] The theme of the "strange child" is not widely recognized in the Polish thought; see Pieciul-Karmińska (2017) for current research on subsequent incarnations of the romantic "genius".

[16] The category includes Peter Pan, Pippi Langstrumpf or, in another medium, Steven Spielberg's E.T.

So Felix thought the strange child was a boy, and Christlieb insisted that their new friend was a girl, and they could not agree. (Hoffmann 2010: 155)

Also, when asked directly about its sex, the "strange child" ignores the question:

"Then you're a prince!" – "Then you're a princess!" cried Felix and Christlieb at the same time, amazed and almost alarmed.
"Yes, indeed," replied the strange child. (Hoffman 2010: 168)

The child's neutrality is not only manifested through its neutral grammatical gender, but also through its "miraculous" universality. Hence, it is not so much the case of the reader identify themselves with the protagonist as of the "genderlessness" itself becoming a character in the tale. The neutrality of the "strange child" becomes a constitutive element of its identity: it is a key element of the story world.

The Polish translations of *Das fremde Kind*

Hoffmann's fairy tale is not very well known to Polish readers, despite its two pre-WWII translations and one from 2014. Perhaps its relative lack of popularity has to do with grammatical differences and problems of worldview? Regardless of the reason, there is a reception gap: the contemporary translation cannot make up for the two hundred years of the virtual absence of the genius motif in Polish literary awareness.

None of the translators decided to signal the gender neutrality of the title character at the level of conjugation. The child does not say *byłom* [be-PAST-1ST-NEUT], *widziałom* [see-PAST-1ST-NEUT] but (in line with the androcentrism of Polish, whereby masculine gender is treated as universal) it uses the 1st person masculine gender. Would perhaps a higher degree of liberalism of the Polish grammar be conducive to more willingness on the part of translators to perform formal experiments? The question is pertinent also because in the translation of Hoffmann's fairy tale there is more room for such experiments than in the translation of folk-style tales such as the ones by the brothers Grimm. I pose this question self-critically, because as a translator myself, I did not decide to use the neuter forms of verbs in the 1st and 2nd person in my translation.

"Strange child" in the contemporary German prose: Paul Maar's "das Sams"

An interesting embodiment of the genderless "genius" can be found in the best-selling series of contemporary German writer Paul Maar on the

adventures of a magical character called *das Sams*. This is an almost textbook implementation of the idea of a genius in literature, in particular of gender neutrality, which is not only expressed through grammatical forms (the magical character is referred to as *das Sams*) but also verbalised in the content of the story (cf. Pieciul-Karmińska 2017).

Paul Maar, known for his intertextual references to E.T.A. Hoffmann's prose, almost directly quotes Hoffmann in a scene that vividly resembles the one quoted above, when the sex of the strange playmate is found problematic. When the main character of Maar's book, Mr. Taschenbier, goes shopping to buy clothes for Sams, the seller says:

> Ein hübsches Kind haben Sie da in Ihrem Rucksack, wirklich niedlich. *Ist das ein Junge oder ein Mädchen*? (Maar 1973: 51)
>
> [You have a nice child in your backpack, really beautiful. Is this a boy or a girl?]

If the question shows that Sams's sex is unrecognisable to others, Mr. Taschenbier's response shows that he considers it irrelevant. He first bends helplessly over the backpack and asks: "Bist du ein Junge oder ein Mädchen?" (Maar 1973: 51) [Are you a boy or a girl?], and when Sam replies: "Ich bin ein Sams, das weißt du doch, Papa" [I am *ein Sams*, you know that very well, Daddy], he decides to proceed in the same manner that Christlieb and Felix from Hoffmann's tale assigned sex to the strange child: "Na ja, sagen wir mal: ein Junge" [Well, let's say it's a boy] (Maar 1973: 51).

Sams's neutrality in terms of gender is emphasized more strongly here than in Hoffmann's tale: Sams does not so much respond evasively as, reproachfully, reminds us that the question about its sex is out of place. *Das Sams* is presented as a separate category, in which the sex dichotomy according to the "male-female" pattern loses its validity. This category is something like a fully legitimate "third sex".

The Polish translator, Anna Gamroth (cf. Maar 2009), probably did not recognize the intertextuality, the play with Hoffmann's original tale and the ideological significance of the neuter gender (cf. Pieciul-Karmińska 2017: 36ff.). She turned the common noun *das Sams* into the proper name *Sobek*, semantically transparent, yet evoking a completely different range of associations. The neuter gender has been eliminated, although the source text neologism could quite simply be translated into Polish as *Sobotko*. *Sobotko* reflects the function of the original *das Sams*: it is a neologism, recognisable as a common noun in the neuter gender, semantically transparent and related to the Polish *sobota* 'Saturday' (because Sams always comes on Saturday, i.e. *Samstag* in German). The target text masculine form *Sobek* is another example of eliminating neutrality in translation.

4. Translation of grammar, translation of culture?

In my opinion, these examples show that the broad use of the neutral gender in German has semantic significance: *Neutrum* is used in universal contexts to ensure genderless and universal description. A wide range of gender-neutral characters proves that a specific worldview is encoded in this gender.

In Polish, it is apparently the masculine gender that is "universal" and default.[17] However, androcentrism in the Polish grammar does not necessarily evoke critique; cf. the following cautious conclusions from Nagórko:

> Without exaggeration, we can say that the Polish grammar privileges men [...]. However, as long as it happens only in language, women need not be concerned. (Nagórko 1997: 95)

Needn't they?[18] I will refer to another translator's experience, which shows that the masculine gender in Polish is only seemingly universal and its role cannot be considered analogous to the one played by the neutral gender in German.

In his book *Qui suis-je?*, a volume from the series *PhiloZenfants*, the French author Oscar Brenifier (2013) is trying to answer the title question in six chapters, and since the book is designed for both boys and girls, the illustrations by Aurélien Débat alternately show a boy and a girl. In the Polish translation (Brenifer 2014) a bizarre thing happens: all the utterances of the child character are translated into the masculine forms, so the illustrations with a girl are accompanied with the captions in which the masculine forms are used: "jestem za mały" [I am too small-MASC], "nie prosiłem się na świat" [not ask PAST-1ST-MASC onto the world]. The masculine gender does indeed seem to dominate our thinking: androcentrism transpires even in the context of illustrations. (Interestingly, the book was translated by a woman.) It also suggests that something is lacking in the Polish language: the neutral gender analogous to that in German.

On the other hand, there are attempts to disenchant the androcentric vision of the world in children's literature. One of the publishing houses (Wytwórnia) has recently published two different versions of the same book by Maria Dek (2017a,b):

[17] For some authors (Łaziński 2006: 206ff.), masculine indeed is a universal gender, while others (Duda 2016) are critical of the idea.

[18] Contrary to this view, Tokarski (1999: 81) points out that in colloquial Polish, "one of us" is a man, and "a stranger" is a woman.

The book comes in two versions: *Kiedy będę duża* [When I am big-FEM] and *Kiedy będę duży* [When I am big-MASC], for girls and for boys. The same dreams, without restriction, are available to everyone.

The publishers decision leaves no doubt: in Polish, one cannot speak "universally" about both genders. The universality of the German neutral gender reveals the deficit of the dichotomous world of Polish, with a distinct dominance of the masculine.

How can translation of grammar from one language to another become a translation of the "culture of the community where that language evolved" (Tabakowska 2002: 73)? Could the translation from German into Polish preserve something from the source linguistic worldview and thus enrich the target worldview? After all, we introduce into the translated text an interpretation suggested by different linguistic means: "the act of importation can potentially dislocate or relocate the whole of the native structure. [...] No language [...] imports without risk of being transformed" (Steiner 1998 [1975]: 315). Translation is like incarnation, says Steiner: it introduces new thought systems that would not have had a chance to exist in the target language unless it is endowed with adequate linguistic means. Translation is therefore not so much a matter of linguistic transformation as a kind of creative ferment (cf. Pieciul-Karmińska 2007: 215).

In this sense, translation can become a "channel" for introducing new interpretations, new thoughts, new worlds, or other linguistic worldviews, prompted by different linguistic devices. Translation is a meeting point: it can become a platform where one culture opens to another culture's way of thinking. In the realm of gender, it can signal the universality of literary characters and free the readers from the dichotomous[19] androcentric approach.

This analysis of literary examples is also a personal account of my own reservation with regard to formal experiments. In fact, by contrasting the neutral gender in German with the imperfect conjungation of the neuter gender in Polish I hope not only to visualize the asymmetry of these two "worlds", but also to encourage other translators to be more creative. The use of neuter endings in the 1st and 2nd person in literary texts, especially those addressed to children, will not only retain the function of the source

[19] The dichotomy of the Polish colloquial linguistic worldview clearly transpires in Teresa Hołówka's masteful paraphrase of Whorf's linguistic relativity principle. Describing "a tribe living on the Vistula River" [i.e., Poles], she points up the omnipresent personification in Polish, which is "strongly marked by classifying beings as 'males' or 'females', and implied in every noun due to the obligatory patterning of grammatical gender" (Hołówka 1986: 110).

text grammar but also allow the stereotypical, dichotomous perspective to embrace a wider, universal dimension of "all humans".

Translated by Anna Wyrwa

References

Bąk, Piotr. 1979. *Gramatyka języka polskiego*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.

Bell, Anthea. 2006. Translator's Notebook: Delicate Matters. In Gillian Lathey (ed.) *The Translation of Children's Literature. A Reader*. 232–240. Clevedon-Buffalo-Toronto.

Bettelheim, Bruno. 1976. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy-Tales*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Duda, Maciej. 2016. Płeć języka polskiego. In Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska, Maciej Duda, Marta Mazurek and Aleksandra Sołtysiak-Łuczak (eds.) *Gender w podręcznikach. Projekt badawczy. Tom 1.* 186–198. Warszawa: Fundacja Feminoteka.

Dzięgiel, Ewa. 2015. Rodzaj gramatyczny a płeć: przykład neutrum ekspresywnego w odniesieniu do osób i zwierząt w jednej z polskich gwar na Ukrainie. *Prace Językoznawcze* XVII/4: 13–23.

Freud, Sigmund. 1960. *The Ego and the Id*. Trans. Joan Riviere. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1989 [1960]. *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed. Trans. revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Sheed and Ward.

Grzegorczykowa, Renata. 1999. Pojęcie językowego obrazu świata. In Jerzy Bartmiński (ed.) *Językowy obraz świata*. 39–46. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.

Grzegorczykowa, Renata. 2002. *Wprowadzenie do semantyki językoznawczej*. Warszawa: PWN.

Helbig, Gerhard and Joachim Buscha. 1991. *Deutsche Grammatik. Ein Handbuch für den Ausländerunterricht*. Leipzig: Verlag Enzyklopädie.

Hołówka, Teresa. 1986. *Myślenie potoczne. Heterogeniczność zdrowego rozsądku*. Warszawa: PIW.

Jakobson, Roman. 2000 [1959]. On linguistic aspects of translation. In Lawrence Venuti (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*. 113-118. London and New York: Routledge.

Kümmerling-Meibauer, Brigitte. 1997. Geschlecht und Charakter in der Kinderliteratur. *Lesezeichen* 2: 27–49.

Łaziński, Marek. 2006. *O panach i paniach. Polskie rzeczowniki tytularne i ich asymetria rodzajowo-płciowa*. Warszawa: PWN.

Maćkiewicz, Jolanta. 1999. Kategoryzacja a językowy obraz świata. In Jerzy Bartmiński (ed.) *Językowy obraz świata*. 47–56. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.

Nagórko, Alicja. 1996. *Zarys gramatyki polskiej*. Warszawa: PWN.

Pieciul-Karmińska, Eliza. 2007. *Językowy obraz Boga i świata. O przekładzie teologii niemieckiej na język polski*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie.

Pieciul-Karmińska, Eliza. 2017. Proza Paula Maara a jej przekład na język polski w kontekście intertekstualnego motywu „tajemniczego dziecka". In Eliza Pieciul Karmińska, Beate Sommerfeld and Anna Fimiak-Chwiłkowska (eds.) *Przekład literatury dla dzieci – między manipulacją a autonomicznością estetyczną*. 13–46. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.

Poźlewicz, Agnieszka, Justyna Duch-Adamczyk, and Christoph Schatte. 2013. *Syntax des Deutschen im Abriss*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Rys.
Saloni, Zygmunt. 1992. Co istnieje a co nie istnieje we fleksji polskiej. *Prace Filologiczne* XXVII: 75–87.
Saloni, Zygmunt and Marek Świdziński. 1998. *Składnia współczesnego języka polskiego*. Warszawa: PWN.
Skibicki, Monika. 2007. *Polnische Grammatik*. Hamburg: Buske.
Steiner, George. 1998 [1975]. *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Szober, Stanisław. 1962. *Gramatyka języka polskiego*. 12th edition, ed. by Witold Doroszewski. Warszawa: PWN.
Tabakowska, Elżbieta. 2002. Tłumaczenie gramatyki czy przekład kultur. In Władysław Chłopicki (ed.) *Język trzeciego tysiąclecia II. Polszczyzna a języki obce: przekład i dydaktyka*. 71–80. Kraków: Tertium.
Tokarski, Ryszard. 1999. Językowy obraz świata w metaforach potocznych. In Jerzy Bartmiński (ed.) *Językowy obraz świata*. 65–81. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
Tokarski, Ryszard. 2001. Słownictwo jako interpretacja świata. In Jerzy Bartmiński (ed.) *Współczesny język polski*. 343–370. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
Wierzbicka, Anna. 1996. *Semantics: Primes and Universals*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Wojtasiewicz, Olgierd. 1996 [1957]. *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia*. Warszawa: TEPIS.

Sources

Brenifier, Oscar. 2013. *Qui suis-je?* Paris: Éditions Nathan.
Brenifier, Oscar. 2014. *Ja – co to takiego?* Trans. Magdalena Kamińska-Maurugeon. Poznań: Zakamarki.
Dek, Maria. 2017a. *Kiedy będę duża*. Warszawa: Wytwórnia.
Dek, Maria. 2017b. *Kiedy będę duży*. Warszawa: Wytwórnia.
Grimm, Jakub and Wilhelm Grimm. 2010. *Baśnie dla dzieci i dla domu*. Trans. Eliza Pieciul-Karmińska. Poznań: Media Rodzina.
Hoffman, Ernst Theodor Amadeus. 2010. *The Nutcracker and The Strange Child*. Trans. Anthea Bell. London: Pushkin Press.
Hoffmann, Ernst Theodor Amadeus. 2014. *Tajemnicze dziecko*. Trans. Eliza Pieciul-Karmińska. Poznań: Media Rodzina.
KHM. Grimm, Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm. 1857. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Göttingen.
Maar, Paul. 1973. *Eine Woche voller Samstage*. Hamburg: Deutscher Taschenbuch.
Maar, Paul. 2009. *Tydzień pełen sobót*. Trans. Anna Gamroth. Poznań: Media Rodzina.